

A Biblical Basis for Adoption

The local church can play a key role in adoption by educating and orienting its members to its scriptural foundations, to the studies that show the positive outcomes of adoption, to the needs of our society that can be met through adoption, and to the opportunities and ideas for ministry that relate to adoption.



Adoption: An Overarching Theme of the Scriptures

Most of us are at least familiar with the concept of God's adoption of us when we become Christians. Adoption embodies the biblical theme of the covenant. It is important to see that adoption is more than a legal contract—it is a relationship of promise. In fact, this distinction can be made of all family relationships. The relationship between God and His people is covenantal, not contractual, and God intends that family relationships mirror his covenant relationship with us. Calvin wrote, "God's covenant was not made to last only for a few days, or for a short time. When He adopted the children of Abraham, He took them under His keeping forever."

The apostle Paul also uses the adoption analogy in his writings several times. Christians are adopted members of God's family, a privilege originally bestowed exclusively on Israel but through Christ made available to all through faith in him. According to a Roman-Syrian lawbook written in Paul's era, a man might be able to disown his biological son if he had good reason, but he could never disown his adopted son. The adoption analogy used by Paul was a strong one indeed.

The scriptural image of adoption emphasizes a) the sovereign character of God in planning our salvation, b) the newness of the family relationship he establishes, c) its climate of intimate trust and love and d) the gracious and immense inheritance our adoption affords us. This scriptural analogy gives us a wonderful picture of God's character and love for us as his children.

Scriptural Principles Can Be Applied to Families

There are several similarities between adoption into God's family and a child's adoption into a human family. First and foremost, adoption is one of only two ways that God has ordained for human families to be built. The relationship of parent to child is a covenantal relationship, bestowed on a family whether through birth or adoption. Just as marriage is modeled after Christ and his bride, the church, so parental love is modeled after God as Father of his people. God's plan for children is that they experience life in the midst of this covenantal relationship between a mother and a father.

The Scriptures give us examples of birth mothers making adoption plans (Jochebed and Moses, Exodus 2:10), families formed through adoption (Mordecai and Esther, Esther 2), and exhortations to care for orphans. Perhaps the most profound example of adoption in the Scriptures is Joseph's adoption of Jesus. It should not surprise us that God desired for Jesus to have an earthly father, consistent with His plan for marriage and parenthood. The lineage of Jesus, as prophesied in the Old Testament, is fulfilled through Joseph (see Matthew 1:1-17). Joseph is fully and completely Jesus' father—participating in his naming, protecting him from danger by traveling to Egypt, teaching him a trade and presenting him at the temple.

Scriptural images can deepen our understanding of God's covenant family and His love for us. A true understanding of adoption gives us an overwhelming sense of permanence; God's permanent relationship to his children, and the permanent relationship of adopted children in their families.

*Please see our resource,
Partakers of the Grace: Biblical Foundations for Adoption
<https://www.ppl.org/partakers-of-the-grace>*

This bulletin insert is the first in a four-part series made available to churches by Presbyterians Protecting Life. PPL seeks to equip and encourage the local church to support adoption. Churches can play a role in adoption by encouraging young women in crisis pregnancies to consider adoption, providing resources to couples who desire to build or grow their family through adoption, and helping children here and abroad who wait for permanent families. We publish written materials on adoption and network with pastors and lay people interested in adoption issues. For more information, please contact: Presbyterians Protecting Life, PO Box 5239 Lancaster, PA 15101, 317-434-4558, Ext. 800, Email us at: ppl@ppl.org.

The Benefits of Adoption

Once we have laid the foundations for adoption from the Scriptures, it is helpful to look at the facts and realities of adoption today. Many comprehensive studies have confirmed the positive outcomes of adoption for birth parents, children, and adoptive parents.



The benefits for young women who choose adoption are many. One study found that single teen mothers who chose adoption for their children were as satisfied with their decision as those who chose to parent. Studies have also shown that unmarried young women who make adoption plans for their babies have higher educational aspirations, are more likely to finish school, and less likely to live in poverty and receive public assistance than those who parent. They also delay marriage longer, are more likely to marry eventually and are less likely to repeat an out-of-wedlock pregnancy than those who become single parents.

Of all the options in an unmarried pregnancy, planning for adoption is chosen the least often. On a national scale, less than 5% of unmarried women who carry their babies to term make adoption plans. Perhaps if more women were presented with a comprehensive, biblically-rooted view of adoption, they might choose it over abortion or single parenting. A birth mother who made an adoption plan shares her thoughts:

I was single, no prospects of marriage. I thought about where I would be in 10 years, looking back. Would I rather look back on a life that began and was then abruptly ended? Or, would I want to look back on a life that I knew still existed, even if I had no part in it? I could make something positive out of something negative.

I wanted my baby to have a mother, a father and lots of love. I was in no position to offer that. I knew I couldn't end its life, but I also knew that I couldn't give it anything more than that—life. But I did know that there were people out there who could. Adoption as a solution to my problem pregnancy seemed the first and best choice. My baby has loving parents, grandparents and cousins. She has love and affection and everything I knew I couldn't give her and desperately wanted her to have.

Children Thrive in Adoption

A recent study interviewed over 700 teenagers who had been adopted as infants. The study, the largest ever of adopted teens and their families, looked at various indicators of well-being. Among other things, it found these teens:

- Received and benefited from lots of support from family, friends, and others;
- Were involved in many positive, structured youth activities, such as sports, music, congregational youth programs, and community organizations;
- Saw themselves as being as strong as their peers in personal identity and self-esteem;
- Showed high levels of caring values and behaviors, such as volunteering.

Another study compared government data on four groups: 1) children adopted into a two-parent family; 2) children born into a two-parent family; 3) children being raised by an unmarried mother; 4) children being raised by their grandparents. It found that:

- Children from Group 1 did well in school, repeating a grade at the rate of only 7 percent compared to 12 percent of children in Group 2.
- The first two groups of children share similarly high scores regarding general health.
- Group 1 enjoys a quality of home environment superior to all the other groups.
- Group 1 has access to health care that is superior to all other groups.

***Please see our resource pamphlet,
Adoption: Five Myths and Realities***

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Meeting Needs Through Adoption

1.2 million babies are aborted each year in our country, and the number of children born without fathers has reached 33%. How can churches make adoption a more common choice for women in unplanned pregnancies? Some churches become a meeting place for mentoring programs, where older birth moms can present the realities of making an adoption plan to younger pregnant women. Church members can also offer career counseling, tutoring and material support.



Church families involve themselves in supporting the life-giving option of adoption by becoming shepherding homes. Shepherding homes are usually families who invite a young woman in a crisis pregnancy to live with them during pregnancy and the birth of the baby. This provides a young woman with a mother and father role model, and is also a good way to build partnerships with local agencies and pregnancy centers. Pastors play a key role in providing counseling during this time of decision-making.

Older Children Wait

Teenagers make up 26% of those waiting to be adopted, while only 11% of those adopted are teens. More than 600,000 American children will spend all or part of this year in substitute care such as foster homes, group homes or shelters (114,000 of them are free to be adopted). Many of these children have experienced abuse or neglect, or have biological parents who cannot adequately care for them.

Churches play a role in promoting the adoption of older and minority children. One example is the Celebration Youth Choir, a group of 15-20 youngsters in Cleveland, Ohio who traveled to area churches. The singers, ages 10-14, all awaited adoption. The choir performed with the other youth choirs at the churches they visited. The director of the program said this serves a purpose: "It says, 'Look. They're all kids, they all need love, they all need families. And up there, singing next to each other, they are all the same.'"

The Presbyterian Church (USA) supports children's homes that often serve and care for teens who are available for adoption. The Preparation for Adoption Program at the Grandfather Home in Banner Elk, North Carolina [www.grandfatherhome.org] focuses on increasing successful adoptions through intensive counseling for the teens and their new families. One representative of the program says, "I feel that God has moved in this place. He is giving us this program. Instead of housing children, we are now helping to make children what they were created to be: members of a family."

Church families could consider teenagers who are about to reach the age of ineligibility for adoption, providing them with a permanent family they might not otherwise have. The consideration of adopting an older child can include sibling groups. A family who adopted five older siblings at the same time, found great emotional and material support from their church.

The need for families for older children doesn't necessarily stop at our borders. Literally thousands of older children overseas wait for a family to adopt them. Many families who would consider adding to their family through international adoption discount the idea after discovering the cost. Some churches have found ways help families in their congregation afford this kind of adoption. One church sponsored a clothing drive for a family who adopted a large sibling group internationally, helping to ease the initial financial outlay.

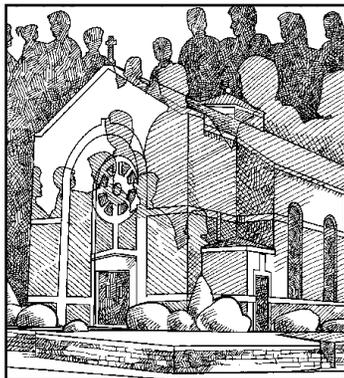
Churches also forge partnerships with orphanages and Christians in a particular countries to facilitate adoptions. One Presbyterian church in Oklahoma is supporting a Russian orphanage the same size as their congregation, sending medical supplies and other material support to the children there.

Please see our resource, Four Families Talk About Interracial Adoption

This bulletin insert is the third in a four-part series made available to churches by Presbyterians Protecting Life. PPL seeks to equip and encourage the local church to support adoption. Churches can play a role in adoption by encouraging young women in crisis pregnancies to consider adoption, providing resources to couples who desire to build or grow their family through adoption, and helping children here and abroad who wait for permanent families. We publish written materials on adoption and network with pastors and lay people interested in adoption issues. For more information, please contact: Presbyterians Protecting Life, PO Box 5239 Lancaster, PA 15101, 317-434-4558, Ext. 800, Email us at: ppl@ppl.org.

Adoption - What Your Church Can Do

The call to involvement in adoption might look different in every church. Including adoption in the work of the church is limited only by our creativity and resolve. Churches can enlist the unique mix of gifts of their members to enhance and bring adoption awareness to their already existing ministries. Here are some practical steps your church might consider to support adoption:



- Encourage and support families who adopt waiting children, or consider adopting a child into your own family.
- Become a meeting place for a birth parent mentoring program.
- Develop a means of providing financial support for families in your church who wish to adopt. One church started an “Abraham and Sarah Fund” specifically for helping families with adoption costs.
- Find out about adoption procedures in countries where you already support missionaries.
- Invite an agency specializing in international adoption or waiting children to speak to your congregation.
- Study adoption in-depth in your women’s circle or adult ed.
- Consider the financial needs of children in foster care or orphanages who need surgery or other medical care before being adopted.
- Invite a young woman who made an adoption plan for her baby to share her story.
- Enlist your youth group in short-term missions projects to help families with special needs children. One youth group built a wheelchair ramp for a family who adopted a child with physical challenges.

About Presbyterians Protecting Life

This bulletin insert series has been made available to churches by Presbyterians Protecting Life. As an integral part of its ministry, PPL seeks to equip and encourage the local church to support adoption. Adoption fits PPL’s organizational goals in many ways. It is our belief that integrating adoption into our ministry and mission will do much to enhance a “return to the Biblical teaching concerning the sacred value of the family” and reaffirm PPL’s commitment to “strengthening the bonds of family love and nurture.” We firmly believe that the Church’s strong involvement in adoption will do much to enhance its witness for the sanctity of life.

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We have created and compiled materials that are of assistance to lay persons, pastors, and congregations regarding adoption. It is vital to approach adoption from a distinctly biblical framework, as a God-ordained institution and not just an aspect of social services. We want to encourage individual congregations and PPL chapters with concrete suggestions for active involvement in adoption.

Visit our website at ppl.org or write to us for more information on adoption, to receive our newsletter, or for general information on the work of Presbyterians Protecting Life.



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